

The circumstances of each death are different. Some victims were killed by domestic partners, others by complete strangers. But there is a thread of similarity running through the cases as well. According to AVP, around half of the slayings this year appear to be hate-motivated violence. In the case of the transgender victims, many are initially misidentified and mis-gendered by both police and media reports.

In the case of Papi Edwards, for example, [Buzzfeed reported](#) how police insisted she was a man, despite the fact that she presented as a woman at the time she was killed, and a key witness said the gunman became angry after learning Edwards was transgender.

In its letter, the AVP called on public officials, law enforcement and media to address the violence. "We appear to be in a moment of crisis in LGBTQ communities," the group said. "Violence remains a life or death issue for far too many in our communities." Dozens of advocacy groups signed the document.

AVP's most recent annual report, released last October, documented 18 anti-LGBT homicides in 2013. Almost 90 percent of the victims were people of color, and more than two-thirds were transgender women. While firm numbers are not yet available for 2014, a spokesperson for AVP said that between 20 and 25 killings occurred last year, but only two of these occurred during the first three months of the year.

The letter calls on media and police departments to accurately identify victims, and on public officials to pass laws addressing the ongoing day-to-day discrimination many LGBT people continue to face, which leads to increased rates of poverty, housing instability and unemployment.

"Violence is complex, and requires multiple strategies to prevent and end it," the letter reads. "This includes prevention and awareness efforts to change our culture, more social support for transgender people, and addressing poverty, discrimination, housing instability, criminalization, family separation, unemployment, and trauma. It is no longer simply enough to say 'transphobic, biphobic, and homophobic violence and homicides are wrong.'"

Sharon Stapel, the director of the Anti-Violence Project, said the volume of deaths so far this year was “alarming and cause for concern.” But she also said that it was difficult to know whether there were more killings this year than previous years, or whether better reporting caused the spike in the numbers. There is scant data besides what the anti-violence project collects.

“It's hard to know -- does this number indicate an increase of violence that people are experiencing? A backlash? Is it the more visible people are, the more vulnerable people are to violence? Or does it just represent a better identification of people killed?” she said. “I wish we all knew the answer to that question.”

No matter the underlying reason, the deaths send waves of fear and vulnerability through the transgender community. As Bamby Salcedo, a transgender activist based in Los Angeles, put it, “We have to live in constant fear.”

And while increased visibility is beneficial to the movement, Salcedo said, it can also come with a cost. Last year, she learned about the death of her close friend Zoraida Reyes, a 28-year-old woman whose [body was found behind a Dairy Queen in Anaheim](#), California. That same day, Salcedo was supposed to attend the West Coast Liberty Awards, where she was being honored for her work as a transgender activist. “I was devastated,” she said.

On the phone this week, Salcedo recalled her old friend. “Even though she was an activist, she was also a shy girl. Very sensitive, always helpful to others.” Salcedo said she debated that day whether to go to the awards ceremony, but in the end, she chose to go and speak about what had happened to her friend.

“I think even though there has been more visibility, there are only certain individuals who get that visibility, who have that privilege and safety,” she said. “We’re also living a double-edged sword. When there’s increasing visibility, there’s also increasing hate towards our community.”